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Evaluation Interviews for Better Performance

[21.1] Hold an interview with the employee as soon as convenient after you have rated him. This lets you:

- Discuss the job and its responsibilities.
- Clear up any misconceptions.
- Suggest ways the employee can improve under-par areas.
- Explain company policies or actions that may have caused dissatisfaction.
- Motivate the employee to perform better in the future.
- Boost his morale, by telling him what he's done well.

This interview is a good time to correct an employee's faults. Here, constructive criticism is a scheduled order of business. The employee is braced to hear the worst; many times he'll be favorably surprised. So, he'll be in a receptive mood to follow your suggestions.

1. Begin the interview by asking questions. The employee's answers and reactions will give you an opportunity to lead into things gradually. Don't start with negative comments.

2. If you have a number of negative matters to take up, allow more time for the interview than you would otherwise. This will give you a chance to discuss what the employee should do about improving. He can suggest positive steps for his own development.

3. Make all correction constructive. Give the employee **positive** ways of building up his self-confidence, and improving his performance.

4. In a subsequent interview, find out whether the employee actually took some or all of the **corrective** steps that you suggested; **see** how they affected his later performance.

5. Give the employee a chance to suggest specific ways the *company* could improve **operations**, and make his work more effective. Hear him out. Some of his ideas may be worth passing along. If you feel his suggestions wouldn't work, don't ridicule his idea; don't pass the buck to higher management ("I'd go along with you, but *they* wouldn't see it that way."); let him **know** if you think a change might be made later on, if not immediately.

A successful evaluation interview with a key employee, for example, a professional worker, a salesman, or a first-line supervisor, often means significant **gain**. On the other hand, an unsuccessful interview with a key employee may mean **lost sales**, lower efficiency from other workers, as well. Often, a **rater** is unprepared to meet the reaction he gets when he holds the evaluation interview. Here are typical reactions — and suggestions on how the **rater** can deal with them more effectively:

► *The employee who pushes for a raise or promotion:* The employee glows with pride when you tell him the company is pleased with his performance. He next wants to know how much of a raise he'll be getting; when he'll get it; what sort of promotion you have in mind for him.

- If he's a top-flight performer you should have his future advancement planned ahead of time. Give him the facts, dates and figures.

- If he's good, but you don't expect to advance him for a few months, tell him so. Let him know you're working with him to get him advanced as rapidly as his abilities and performance justify your confidence in him.

- If his performance is good, but not outstanding, tell him what shortcomings are standing in his way now; suggest what he can do about them; tell him when he'll be scheduled for another evaluation.

- If his performance is average or below average, don't give him false hopes. Check yourself; Perhaps you covered up an unfavorable rating in such a way that the employee interprets *absence of criticism* as *praise*. If the employee **pushes** for advancement despite mediocre performance, tell him frankly that he'll have to show improvement before he can be considered again.

► *The employee who misunderstands:* No matter what you say to him, the words hit him the wrong way. Or, he may be oversensitive to your personal reaction to him as an individual. (For example, if you admonish him about a small mistake he may feel you're riding him too hard or that you're kidding. It depends on the man and the circumstances.)

- Choose your words carefully, so they mean what you want them to mean. If there's possibility for doubt, define or explain as you go along.

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- Remember that employees often don't hear things they don't want to. For instance, if you expect a salesman to make 100 productive calls during a specified period, he may feel he's outdone the limit by making 150 calls—but only 75 of which were productive. Make sure he understands you want 100 productive calls.

- Be aware of employees' sensitivities. Otherwise, even the best-intentioned efforts may backfire. Holding a meeting of the old-timers in your department to iron out some problems may flatter some employees; chances are many will resent being classified as "old."

- *The employee who wants to argue:* For many employees, arguing is a way of talking through their problems. By listening to a man sound off, the supervisor may be able to find the true source of trouble.

- Thank the employee for putting his point of view into words. Tell him you'll look into the situation he thinks is troublesome, and will talk to him about it again.

- Don't be drawn into an argument.

- If the employee objects to a particular evaluation as unfair, make sure he understands your position—even if he doesn't agree with it. But, don't back down.

- Follow up on this problem. Hold another interview after you've investigated his complaints.

- *The employee who gets angry:* If an employee blows up when you discuss his merit ratings, let him! Wait for him to cool off; perhaps, wait a few days to reschedule an interview.

- Don't take advantage of the fact he lost his temper. Make a point of being friendly when you meet him around the building after the unpleasant session.

- If he's still sore during the second interview, hear him out. Don't get angry or argue with him. But don't avoid future interviews with him, just because they're unpleasant experiences. (He'll learn to stage a flare-up whenever he doesn't want to discuss a problem in the future.)

- Try to avoid the "either-or-else" situation, which forces you to invoke discipline to save face. Wait for him to calm down; then try to persuade him.

- *The conscientious objector:* This employee makes a career out of feeling misunderstood. He objects to your evaluation, and says so, but without emotion and without the temper tantrums.

- Discuss the employee's objections; try to find out what's bothering him. If you find out later that he had a point, concede it.

- Don't let the disagreement worry you. Be calm about a difference of opinion.

- Don't let the difference of opinion handicap your personal or working relationship. Check up occasionally to see that the conscientious objector is keeping up his performance, not goofing off on the job to get even.

- *The yes man:* Superficially, he's easy to handle; doesn't give you a hard time. But, underneath it all, you can't be sure whether he's heard your comment; whether he agrees or disagrees; whether he cares. Usually, his performance is only so-so.

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- Continue the interview, despite his agreement. Often, his technique is a device to keep you from discussing his shortcomings any further. Similarly, discourage or pass over his attempts to compliment or flatter your supervisory abilities.

- Ask him *why* certain things happened or didn't go well. His answers may give you a clue to his difficulties.

- Tell him *what's wrong*; what he must do to improve. Don't ask for admissions, apologies, or general agreement. But ask his cooperation to follow a specified plan of action. Hold him to it.

- Supervise him more intensively than you have before. Hold follow-up interviews frequently. Try to jolt him out of his rut.

Use the foregoing guides and you will be amazed at the improvement in your interviewing techniques. These and many other useful and practical ideas for developing, training and supervising key employees, as well as salesmen, are contained in *Training and Supervising Salesmen** by Charles L. Lapp.

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If You Had to Decide Quickly —

When faced with a problem involving an employee, you don't generally have days or weeks to study it. Test your ability to make correct, on-the-spot decisions in the situations below.

[21.2] "April Fool" Joke Backfires.—*Problem:* After arriving at work on April 1, an employee telephoned a co-worker to report a "fire" in the garage. An alarm was sounded before the employee could explain it was just a hoax. When the fire engines came, the employee said the "fire" had just been extinguished. The company was suspicious; as a result, the employee was discharged. *Was the discipline too severe?*

► *Solution:* Yes; in this plant, practical joking was a common occurrence; here, the employee became the butt of his own joke. When a similar case was brought before an arbitrator, he decided the employee was not guilty of willful misconduct, and ordered him reinstated with one-third back pay [Suzio Construction Award, 9 ALAA ¶ 70,918]. See ¶ 11,105 et seq. as to discipline and discharge.

[21.3] Sick Pay for Absence Epidemic.—*Problem:* In one day, 22 employees of a utility company's street gang called in sick. Normally the company required proof of illness *after* one day of absence. Since there had been a recent reduction in overtime, the company refused to give the men sick pay on the ground that the act was a retaliatory one. The company investigated the mass absence the same day. *Was the company right?*

► *Solution:* Yes, under the circumstances, 22 men demanding sick pay for the same day should arouse suspicion. An arbitrator deciding similarly in a previous case, granted sick pay only to those men who had valid excuses [Bridgeport Gas Award, 9 ALAA ¶ 70,933]. See ¶ 9504 as to eligibility requirements for sick pay.

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